

PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INDEPENDENT HEARING OFFICER'S REPORT

RE: THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF MANIERRE ELEMENTARY

This report is written in compliance with 105 ILCS 5/34-230 and 234, the Statute which sets out the procedures the Chief Executive Officer and the appointed independent Hearing Officer must follow when the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) proposes to close and relocate schools. The statute also requires the CEO to comply with The Guidelines for School Action for the 2012-2013 school year. In preparation for this report, the following documents have been reviewed:

1. All documents in the Hearing Binder presented by the CEO and admitted into evidence as Board Exhibit 1. The Table of Contents is attached to this Order as Exhibit 1.
2. The Illinois School Report Cards issued by the State of Illinois for both Mayo and Wells Elementary Schools.
3. Website information provided by the Board of Education listing 2012 Progress Reports for Mayo and Wells Elementary.
4. Transcript of the public hearing held at the Board of Education Offices on April 22, 2013
5. 105 ILCS 5/34 – 225 School transition Plans, effective November 30, 2012.
6. Guidelines for School Actions, 2012 – 2013 School Year (issued November 30, 2012).

NOTICE STANDARDS

Illinois statute 105 ILCD 5/34 – 225 was amended effective November 30, 2012. The law governs the notice requirements applying to school transition plans. It requires the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a school district to prepare and implement a school transition plan that identifies and commits specific resources for implementation of the transition for the entire academic year commencing after Board approval of the school action. The statute requires the CEO to include in the plan “services to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of students and support for students with disabilities...” It could be interpreted by some that the statute only requires such a plan to be formulated and published after the school board has approved a school action that is subject to the law.

The Chicago Public School system, much to its credit, adopted Guidelines for the 2012-2013 school year which contain a higher standard as to the contents of a transition plan which is

made available to the affected parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders. The Guidelines acknowledge that the parents need information specifically addressing unique concerns such as the continuation of services supporting the academic, social and emotional needs of the students. If such services are to be eliminated, the plan should project the consequences of such an action.

For convenience the relevant section of the Guidelines is set out here:

Notice of any proposed school action will be provided to the principal, staff, local council, parents or guardians, Illinois State Senator, Illinois State Representative, and Alderman for the school or schools that are subject to the proposed school action. Notice will include date, time and place of public meetings being held to elicit public comment on the proposal.

Along with notice of the CEO's proposal, the CEO will issue a draft school transition plan dependent on the unique circumstances of the proposed school action. The draft school plan will include, but is not limited to the following: (1) Services to support the academic, social and emotional needs of students; supports for student with disabilities, homeless students and English language learners; and support to address security and safety issues; (2) options to enroll in higher performing schools; (3) informational briefings regarding the choice of schools that include all pertinent information to enable the parent or guardian and child to make an informed choice,...

Unfortunately, despite the clearly expressed mandate of the Guidelines, the CEO sent out an identical generic transition plan to all parents in all 50 plus schools subject to closure. No parent or school staff member received a draft plan dependent on the unique circumstances of the proposed school action. Regardless of the obvious differences in the individual schools, each and every parent in every affected school was promised the same thing. Only a computerized change of school names differentiates the letters.

The baffling omission in the transition plan is the failure to consider the very unique circumstance that Manierre School is the recent beneficiary of five distinct multimillion dollar initiatives that are in mid-implementation. These are the Children's Literacy Initiative with Target Corporation, Target's Library Makeover, Erikson Institute's Math Project Innovations, Write2Win and the University of Minnesota's i3 Child-Parent (CPC) Pre-K to Third-Grade Expansion Project. The latter began in 2012 while the others started two years ago. A majority of the testimony at the Community Hearing on April 10, 2013, and the Public Hearing at the Board of Education building on April 30, 2013, was devoted to the significant loss Manierre School students will suffer if these programs are lost due to the transfer of the students to Jenner

Elementary. The second largest topic at the hearings was safety. That topic was mentioned in the transition report sent to parents in only a generic manner without consideration of known risks should the student populations of Manierre and Jenner be consolidated.

PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY

A summary of the recent programming initiated at Manierre School was delivered orally and in writing at the hearings, the five programs consist of the following:

1. Erikson Early Math Project. Manierre stands to see dramatic improvements in math scores as a key participant in an ongoing \$6M, 5-year early mathematics program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Results from the first half of the program, led by the Erikson Institute, have been extremely encouraging. Erickson's president, Samuel Meisels, wrote to urge CPS to keep Manierre open, reminding them that CPS has itself already invested heavily in teacher professional development time for this important program. "Improvements in math teaching practices have occurred at both Manierre and Brentano, and we anticipate significant impact on child outcomes by the conclusion of this 5-year intervention." Erickson Institute's long-term commitment to improved math achievement is a positive sign of continuing improvement.
2. Target Library Makeover. Investment through Target Corporation's \$200K Library Makeover Grant will be lost if the school closes. Target's generous grant, implemented in 2011-2012, provided for the expansion and renovation of the Library, the addition of 2,000 books, and a much-needed new computer lab with computers, televisions, and iPads. This was the first renovation of the library since it was built in 1962 and these new features are less than two years old.
3. Write2Win. Manierre has piloted Write2Win's program for two years. Write2Win's volunteer editors work closely with classroom teachers to personally coach each middle-school student on classroom writing assignments via shared files online. This program would not have been feasible without the addition of computers and new technology made possible by the Target grant. Prior to the 2011 school year, Manierre had not placed a winner or even an honorable mention in any city or state writing competitions for many years, but at the end of just the first year with Write2Win under the direction of the Manierre writing teacher, the school boasted a first-place winner and three finalists in the only 2012 citywide contest it entered. In the 2013 Reading Is Fundamental Chicago writing competition, a Manierre 8th grade student captured first place in the city, and a 6th grade student won third place.
4. Midwest Expansion of the child-Parent Center P-K to 3rd Grade Program (CPC expansion). The CPC program, begun in the fall of 2012, is a proven school improvement model that was awarded \$15 million by the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Office to implement in 16 Chicago schools (including Manierre) and 10 others in Illinois and Minnesota over the next five years (2012 to 2017). An additional \$3 million in private matching contributions and over \$500,000 from principals

and networks in 2012-2013 have been provided to strengthen sustainability and school improvement. The six key CPC elements implemented at Manierre are:

- Effective learning experiences including opening two new full-day Pre-K classes, use of evidence-based instructional practices, and progress monitoring. Parallel enhancements in K to 3rd grade will follow. Large accelerations in learning among children in full-day Pre-K are evident.
- A collaborative leadership team at each site, including the Head Teacher, Parent Resource Teacher, and School-Community Representative in partnership with the principal. The School-Community Representative is a new position this year.
- Curriculum alignment and integration from Pre-K to 3rd grade for language, math, science, and socio-emotional learning. A curriculum alignment plan has been established and site-to site mentoring teams and instructional coaches provide follow-through support.
- Parent involvement and engagement led by the Parent Resource Teacher and School-Community Representative implementing a menu-based system of activities, workshops, and events; a family resource center is in each school. A menu-based parent involvement plan was established.
- PD System of coaching, online modules, and quarterly review and feedback on instructional practices in collaboration with the Erikson Institute.
- Continuity and stability through small classes and teacher aides from K to 3rd grade. The maximum class size in CPC is 25 with teacher aides in each classroom. At least two aides will be hired for the kindergarten year (2013-2014) and then for the early grades. Instructional support teams and outreach to families to ensure high rate of program continuation will enhance these efforts. An attendance incentive program also was established.

5. Children's Literacy Initiative with Target, Target Corporation provided funds to support teachers' literacy coaching and materials. Results from the first year show that 66% of third graders met ISAT standards while only 57% of children at comparison schools met that goal.

The Ferguson Child Parent Center's Parent Resource Teacher submitted oral and written testimony which expanded upon the services participating parents receive. She stated that the parents are surveyed to check their interests or needs. There are other partners participating in the program which offer expertise, These partners include the University of Illinois Nutrition Program, the University of Illinois Job Readiness Program, Consumerism, Financial Literacy and Family Outreach Program. Parents are encouraged to observe the amount of time they spend with their children at home by using a check list compiled by The MidWest Child-Parent Center Expansion 13 Grant Program.

A teacher at the Ferguson Parent Child Center who teaches a full day preschool class for 4 year olds as a Teach for America corps member submitted testimony which recounted that under the guidance of Mrs. Relerford, the Center's Director, Dr. Davis, Manierre's Vice Principal and Mr.

Orr, Manierre's Principal, that her classroom is one of the highest performing classrooms measured by Teach for America's rigorous standards. Teach for America' national staff has visited her classroom multiple times over the last year to observe the positive educational practices that she has been taught.

Two pastors from the Near North Ministry Alliance testified at the hearing on April 30, 2013. The Reverend Barkey from the LaSalle Street Church expressed concern that merging two underperforming Level 3 schools was not providing Manierre students with an opportunity to attend a higher performing school. His viewpoint was repeated by many of the parents testifying. He also stated he was disappointed that Manierre students were not eligible under the Board's rules to apply to any of the four Level 1 schools in the immediate neighborhood. This issue was also raised by community and parent speakers who expressed anger that the Board would choose to send their children to a school performing far below average when so many high performing schools are very nearby.

The Rev. Vicky Curtis, a pastor from Fourth Presbyterian Church spoke of Fourth Presbyterian's long involvement with Manierre School. Her testimony focused on the importance of the Ferguson Child Parent Center. She emphasized that there is a dearth of early childhood programming available to families in the area. The Center fulfills a need for a safe, caring place for parents who are working. Many parents reinforced Rev. Curtis' testimony. They stressed the need for the safe educationally enriched preschool Ferguson offers to working parents and to parents who are attending school in an effort to become qualified for employment.

Another teacher at Ferguson Parent-Child Center spoke about how the Board of Education's Space Utilization Standard has dramatically changed in the last two years. He testified there are three Level 1 schools closer to Manierre than Jenner School. All those schools are socially diverse, but the Board has chosen to send the Manierre students to another all Black underperforming Level 3 school, without exploring other options. Testimony by parents repeated this theme. One group of parents attending the April 15, 2013 hearing even offered their own plan to co-locate nearby Lincoln Elementary School with Manierre. They took into account the fact that Lincoln is so overcrowded that it currently leases nine classrooms from DePaul University.

Repeated concerns were raised at all three hearings that the Level 3 schools in the area are attended by Black children while the Level 1 School are racially diverse. These parents raised the fear that the reason for closing Manierre is more related to the planned rebuilding in the currently vacant Cabrini Green and YMCA properties. These speakers believe that the overcrowding of Jenner School will further force their children to be isolated from the proposed racially integrated neighborhood that is being developed. They also see this as a plan to exclude them from an area that is desirable to developers.

Safety

It cannot be emphasized enough how concerned the Manierre parents are about their children's and their own safety if Jenner and Manierre are merged into one school. Parents testified as to physical attacks they and their children had suffered at the hands of gang members and students from Jenner. There is a history going back over 40 years of rivalry between the two schools.

Division Street is a gang border and it is dangerous for adults and children to cross that demarcation. Manierre's physical education teacher testified that the violence that occurred at basketball games between Manierre and Jenner was so disruptive that the Board of Education realigned the basketball leagues so that the schools no longer play against each other. The physical education teacher testified that Manierre was playing a football game against Ogden School and only Ogden and Manierre School supporters were in attendance when halfway through the game Jenner supporters disrupted the game. A Manierre Student was attacked and suffered injuries requiring hospitalization. That child's mother also testified as to that occurrence and said that under no circumstances would she allow her children to be exposed to the danger of attending Jenner School. Other parents vehemently expressed the same viewpoint. Parents who were testifying primarily as to academic standards always included a concern about safety as part of their testimony.

Utilization Standards and Academic Comparisons

One of the consequences of having the Ferguson Child Center as part of Manierre School is that the programs which support the schools employ a number of highly educated people who can and did critique the Board's methodology and conclusions on academic progress and achievement. These educators used the Board's guidelines to take into account the unique circumstances involving Manierre School that the Board omitted considering in violation of its

own standards. Located at pages 6 through 9 of their report entitled Cost-Effective Reforms Should Continue in Manierre Elementary and Ferguson Child-Parent Center is a detailed analysis of both space utilization and academic progress and achievement. The details of that analysis will not be repeated in their report but the seven conclusions it contains are:

1. Significant investment through federal, corporate, and community-funded projects has recently been established at Manierre and Ferguson CPC. These investments will increase overall achievement and provide opportunities for Manierre students to excel in writing, reading, and math.
2. Improvements in housing and community development in the Old Town area are expected to boost enrollment at Manierre to levels close to full-utilization.
3. Relocation of the Ferguson Child-Parent Center to Jenner is not feasible. Jenner is not designed to house a co-located CPC. Since the operation and implementation of the program will be adversely affected, continuation of the i3 project at Jenner is imperiled.
4. The Jenner building cannot accommodate the combined enrollment of the two schools in an educationally effective way. The utilization is expected to exceed 100% even without further increases in housing demand. Average class sizes are expected to approach 35 students.
5. School safety concerns at the welcoming school, Jenner Elementary, will cause a Diaspora of Manierre students and families, further eroding our school community.
6. Jenner is not a significantly higher performing school than Manierre.
7. Manierre proposes a plan with new investments to enhance current initiatives for the goal of increasing enrollment.

Conclusion

Taking all factors into account including the Board's Guidelines for School Action, the Space Utilization Standards and the Board's measurements comparing the academic progress and achievements of Manierre and Jenner Schools, I find that the Board has violated its own guidelines by failing to consider the unique circumstances of Manierre School. When space utilization, academic progress and performance and safety are taken into account, it is clear that the CEO's documentation has failed to support the proposal to close Manierre School. I therefore do not recommend the School Board enact the proposal to close Manierre School.

Dated: May 3, 2013


Paddy McNamara